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Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

By its decision 1/COP.5 the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa decided to establish the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and defined its terms of reference as a subsidiary body of the Conference to assist it in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention. Accordingly, the Convention secretariat has undertaken various steps to facilitate the reporting process as well as to make the necessary arrangements with the country that will host the first session of the Committee.

As at June 2002, 57 affected countries have finalized the elaboration of their national action programmes to combat desertification (NAPs). In most cases, these NAPs have been adopted by the respective Governments. At the subregional and regional levels, seven subregional action programmes and four regional action programmes have been finalized.

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** The submission of this report was delayed in order to incorporate the results of consultations within the Organization.

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The secretariat of the Convention together with the secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity have established a Joint Liaison Group in order to strengthen coordination between the three instruments and to explore options for further cooperation, including the possibility of joint work plans to enhance synergies among them.

In April 2001, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification convened a Panel of Eminent Personalities to consider the poverty — environment nexus in the context of the timely and effective implementation of the Convention and with the aim of contributing further to the debate leading to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The Panel held two meetings, prepared a report entitled "The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: A Useful Tool for Sustainable Development and Poverty Alleviation" and launched an appeal, the Agadez Call.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/196, encouraged the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and the Council and Assembly of the Global Environment Facility to work cooperatively and effectively to facilitate the financing of the implementation of the Convention. The General Assembly, at its fifty-sixth session, congratulated the Council of the Facility for its decision to recommend making land degradation (desertification and deforestation) a new focal area of the Facility. The Assembly of the Facility, due to meet in Beijing in October 2002, is expected to endorse the Council's recommendation.

As of 15 June 2002, instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession have been deposited by 179 States and one regional economic integration organization.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/196, on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the implementation of that resolution. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly noted the establishment of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention as a subsidiary body of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and invited parties and other actors to participate in the first session of the Committee.

3. The General Assembly also encouraged the conferences of the parties and the secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and other international instruments related to environment and sustainable development to continue their work on enhancing mutual complementarities and to strengthen cooperation with a view to facilitating progress in the implementation of those conventions at the international, regional and national levels and to report thereon to their respective conferences of the parties.

4. The General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session approved the continuation of the current institutional linkage and related administrative arrangements between the United Nations Secretariat and the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification for a further five-year period, to be reviewed by the General Assembly and the Conference of the Parties not later than 31 December 2006.

II. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 56/196

A. Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

5. By its decision 1/COP.5, the Conference of the Parties decided to establish the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and defined its terms of reference as a subsidiary body of the Conference to assist it in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention. Accordingly, the Convention secretariat has undertaken various steps to facilitate the reporting process in preparation for the first session of the Committee.

6. Following the generous offer of the Government of Italy (see section F below), the first session of the Committee will be held in Palermo from 18 to 29 November 2002 for the purpose of reviewing updates to reports already available and/or new reports from all regions. In this regard, 160 reports were submitted to the secretariat by affected country parties (47 from Africa, 32 from Asia, 28 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 17 from Europe and others), relevant organs, funds and programmes of the United Nations system (11), intergovernmental organizations (8) and developed country parties (17).

7. In addition, the Conference decided, as outlined in decision 1/COP.5, that the review process should benefit from regional inputs through consultative meetings. In order to accomplish this requirement, four regional meetings corresponding to the regional implementation annexes were scheduled as follows:

- Asian Regional Meeting for the Review Process, Damascus, 8-12 July 2002
- African Regional Meeting for the Review Process, Windhoek, 15-19 July 2002
- Regional Meeting for Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and other affected country parties on the Review Process, Geneva, 22-26 July 2002
- Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Meeting for the Review Process, Bridgetown, 29 July-2 August 2002.

8. The secretariat has compiled, synthesized and provided a preliminary analysis of the reports submitted by parties and observers and the reports on regional inputs, along thematic priorities identified by the parties, for submission to the Committee.

9. The key thematic topics for the review, are as follows:

(a) Participatory processes involving civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations;

(b) Legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements;

(c) Resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including the conclusion of partnership agreements;

(d) Linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies;

(e) Measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land and for early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought;

(f) Drought and desertification monitoring and assessment;

(g) Access to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how by affected country parties, particularly affected developing country parties.

10. The second session of the Committee will take place during the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties in October 2003.

B. Panel of Eminent Personalities to reflect on the nexus between poverty and environment in the context of the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

11. In April 2001, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification convened a Panel of Eminent Personalities to consider the poverty-environment nexus in the context of the timely and effective implementation of the Convention and with the aim of contributing further to the debate leading to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

12. The Panel, composed of 14 personalities from both developing and developed countries, started its deliberations in October 2001, in the sidelines of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties, and adopted its conclusions at its last meeting, held in Agadez, the Niger, from 25 to 28 February 2002. The Panel prepared a report entitled "The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification: A Useful Tool for Sustainable Development and Poverty Alleviation" and launched an appeal, the Agadez Call. This call underlines the unique role of the Convention in addressing poverty eradication and sustainable development given its special focus on areas of extreme poverty and social instability. The Panel further identified the Convention as a tool for development, environmental protection and the prevention of forced migratory movements.

13. The Panel's report and the Agadez Call were presented to the third Preparatory Meeting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development with the aim of drawing the attention of high-level decision makers towards the distinctive comparative advantage of the Convention as a useful tool for promoting sustainable development in the poorest and marginalized rural areas, thus responding directly to the economic, social and environmental challenges related to poverty alleviation.

C. Action programmes

14. The General Assembly urged affected developing countries that have not yet adopted their national, subregional and regional action programmes to accelerate the process of elaboration of those programmes with a view to finalizing them as soon as possible.

15. As at June 2002, 57 affected countries have finalized the elaboration of their national action programmes to combat desertification (NAPs). In most cases, these NAPs have been adopted by the respective Governments. At the subregional and regional levels, seven subregional action programmes and four regional action programmes have been finalized.

16. Through the preparation and finalization of action programmes, the implementation of the Convention has been intensified in affected countries of all regions. The main emphasis at the moment is in supporting partnership arrangements for fostering the implementation of these programmes, and for establishing linkages between the NAPs and other national sustainable strategies.

17. Country parties to the Convention that had finalized their national action programme and their development partners met in Praia from 5 to 8 March 2002 for a forum on the implementation of the Convention in the framework of the preparatory process to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Participants in this meeting underlined the importance of the linkages between desertification and poverty. They also highlighted the difficulties

encountered, especially by countries that have already adopted their NAPs, in the mobilization of necessary financial resources and the role of development partners in that regard. Participants noted that the level of commitment to NAP funding by the donor community was still not commensurate with the needs expressed and the expectations of affected developing countries, underlining that the only major obstacle for the effective launching of the priority activities identified in the national action programmes was of a financial nature.

18. The forum also addressed other important issues, such as transfer of technology under the Convention, capacity-building, the creation of an enabling framework for the implementation of development policies, the establishment of a framework for integrating policies and strategies and subregional and regional cooperation.

19. Moreover, a declaration entitled "Ministerial Message from Praia", which will be delivered to the World Summit on Sustainable Development by the President of the Republic of Cape Verde, Pedro Pires, was adopted at the forum.

20. In the framework of the cooperation between parties from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, some heads of State and Government and ministers from those regions met in Caracas on 19 and 20 February 2002 and adopted the Caracas Declaration on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. The Caracas Declaration, meant to foster the implementation of the Convention in the context of South-South cooperation, was introduced to the third Preparatory Meeting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. President Hugo Chavez, President of Venezuela, Chairman of that forum, has been mandated by his peers to convey the Caracas Declaration to the World Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.

D. Synergies with other relevant conventions and organizations

21. The secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification prepared and subsequently presented to the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties document ICCD/COP(5)/6 on the review of activities for the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies. This document describes relationships and cooperation between the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar) and other key institutional partners, such as the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Development Programme.

22. Taking into consideration that the governing bodies of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have, in several recommendations, conclusions and decisions, encouraged the secretariats of the three Conventions to cooperate and manage their respective processes as coherently as possible, the three Convention secretariats have established a Joint Liaison Group in order to enhance coordination between the three instruments and to explore options for further cooperation, including the possibility of joint work plans.

23. The first meeting of the Joint Liaison Group took place in Washington, D.C., on 6 December 2001 in the sidelines of the Council of the Global Environment Facility. Participants exchanged information from recent meetings of the three Conventions, shared information on plans for the forthcoming year and explored opportunities to enhance cohesion among the three Conventions and their respective subsidiary bodies. As a starting point, it was decided that a joint workshop on forests should be organized to explore, identify and promote synergies among the Conventions. It was also agreed to create a common calendar of activities.

24. The second meeting of the Joint Liaison Group was held on 30 January 2002 in New York to discuss issues related to the Joint Calendar and the Joint Workshop on Forests. A third meeting of the Group was organized during the month of April in The Hague, during which the participants agreed to hold the Workshop on Forests during the fall of 2002. This workshop will focus on synergies between the

Conventions using forests as the natural resource basis for promoting linkages between them.

25. At the national level, the secretariat has supported the organization of National Workshops on Synergies between the Conventions. This country-driven exercise has brought together various stakeholders involved in the respective Conventions and has emphasized the demand for capacity-building. The main objective of this approach is to integrate the implementation process of the Convention into national development strategies by forging links among current relevant strategies for sustainable development. These workshops have already been organized in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cuba, El Salvador, Mongolia, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Venezuela. The secretariat has received several requests for support from country parties interested in holding such national workshops on synergies during the year 2002.

26. The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/196, also encouraged the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Council and Assembly of the Global Environment Facility to work cooperatively and effectively to facilitate the financing of the full implementation of the Convention by the Facility to achieve the objectives of the Convention in the area of land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation. During previous sessions of the Assembly and the Conference of the Parties, one of the identified obstacles hampering the implementation of the Convention was the lack of financial resources. To address this issue, the international community has identified the Global Environment Facility as one of the providers of core resources to co-finance the implementation of the Convention. The General Assembly, at its fifty-sixth session, congratulated the Council of the Global Environment Facility for its decision to recommend making land degradation (desertification and deforestation) a new focal area of the Facility. The Assembly of the Facility, due to meet in Beijing next October, is expected to endorse the Council recommendation.

E. Action by States

27. In paragraph 2 of its resolution 55/204, the General Assembly called upon all countries that were not yet parties to the Convention to ratify or accede to it as soon as possible.

28. As of 15 June 2002, instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession had been deposited by the following 179 States and one regional economic integration organization: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, the Congo, Comoros, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the European Community, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, the Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, the Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, the Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

F. Arrangements for the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

29. The fifth session of the Conference of the Parties adopted decision 2/COP.5, by which it decided that the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention should be held at Bonn, Germany, the site of the Convention secretariat, from 18 to 29 November 2002, in the event that no party made an offer to host that session and to meet the related additional financial cost. Accordingly, it invited the Executive Secretary, in consultation with the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties, to accommodate, by 20 April 2002, any offer from a party to host the first session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention.

30. During the month of February, the Government of Italy informed the secretariat of its interest to host the session of the Committee at a venue to be decided upon in the southern part of the country. In a note verbale of 26 February 2002, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs further announced that it had earmarked part of its voluntary contribution to the secretariat for the year 2002 for the organization of the meeting of the Committee if Italy was selected as the host country for the meeting.

31. Accordingly, the secretariat informed the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties of this development and requested its authorization to pursue consultations with the Government of Italy on this matter. Consequently, the Bureau gave a mandate to the Executive Secretary to continue talks with the Italian Government so as to obtain a final decision on the exact venue of the meeting. Following these consultations, the Government of Italy informed the secretariat on 7 May 2002 of its offer to host the Committee session in Sicily from 18 to 29 November 2002.

III. Conclusions

32. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of the outcomes of the Council and Assembly of the Global Environment Facility regarding the designation of land degradation (desertification and deforestation) as an additional focal area of the Facility. Likewise, the General Assembly may wish to take note of the conclusions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development relevant to the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and invite the Council and Assembly of the Global Environment Facility as well as the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to operationalize them.**